

State Park System Advisory Council (RSA 216-A:3-kk)
January 10, 2020 Meeting Minutes (*DRAFT*)

A regular meeting of the State Park System Advisory Council (SPAC) held at the DNCR Concord Office, was called to order by Chairman Gilbert with a quorum present.

Council members present: Chair Gilbert for business, Rick Blanchette/Friends of the Wapack, Michael Bruss for historic preservation, Dir Bryce/DNCR designee, Tom Chrisenton/TOA, Rep Ebel/Deputy Speaker, Ruth Griffin for public, Jennifer Kennedy/Blue Ocean Society, Matt Leahy/SPNHF, John Nyhan/Hampton Area Chamber, Rep Panasiti/ED&A, Rep Renzullo/RR&D, and Rep S. Smith/RR&D Chair. Torene Tango-Lowy, serving as the clerk, took minutes.

Also present: Commissioner Stewart, DNCR staff, Alex Fries, Michael Griffin, and John Koopmann.

Call to Order: Chair Gilbert called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Attendees introduced themselves.

Minutes: Rep Smith moved to accept the June 10, 2019 minutes; Mr Blanchett seconded. The motion carries with one abstention.

Advise the Director: *Director's Report.* The report was sent in advance. The reports are posted on the Council webpage and will be added to the Division's Reports webpage. The Council discussed a variety of issues related to the Director's Report. Any additional comments may be sent to Dir Bryce. Chair Gilbert commended Dir Bryce and park staff on the continued improvement of the park system's financial health and park facilities.

Parks Financial Report. Dir Bryce reviewed the draft Parks Summary – 2019 report. The net total for all park system funds less encumbered and deferred revenue is \$2.0Mil (draft). A portion of the State Park Fund balance is used to augment capital budget monies for park improvements and is used for deferred maintenance projects. Continued investments in parks are critical for a viable park system. A healthy Parks Fund balance provides operational stability for impacts such as weather and emergency repairs.

Capital investment projects and financial forecasting were discussed further. Dir Bryce provided an update on the exemption request for SWCAP indirect cost against the Park Fund, see letter to DAS Commissioner Arlinghaus dated Oct 3, 2019. Dir Bryce will provide the amount of financial impact to the Parks Fund and keep the Council informed on this matter.

Other Topics. Mr Wucher discussed a redesign of the parks map to make it more user friendly and to highlight specific parks, such as the Coleman Lodges. It is planned for a fall release. Suggestions included showing highways and rural routes on the map, font size, showing the towns/cities, and an interchangeable cover for summer and winter use as a rack card-sized piece. Send any additional comments to Mr Wucher.

The last Parks Fee Package was submitted in 2012. Updates are needed to cover new pavilions, additional camping sites and amenities, trailhead parking, and weekend/holiday meter pricing. Parks may tighten the Collective Bargaining Agreement to restrict the 50% camping discount to weekday and non-holidays. Parks already supports agencies by providing free use of pavilions for events, such as retirements. Chair Gilbert said the Strategic Plan supports the expansion of facilities and capital investments to improve parks revenue. Mr Chrisenton asked about how "no show" campers are handled so as to make the site available to other campers. Dir Bryce will pass the questions on to the campground reservation manager. Ms Hanson reported on the Library Pass Program and the Complimentary & Discounted Access report. Dir Bryce is considering offering NH seniors, who are granted free access, a way to donate or purchase a seasons pass to help financially support of state parks.

Capital & Parks improvement projects. Mr Mansfield reported on the current capital projects and the deferred maintenance projects, see report. The capital projects are toilet building upgrades at Pawtuckaway, Bear Brook, Winslow and Ellacoya; Mt Washington sewage treatment plant; Mt Sunapee boat launch; and historic sites restoration at Weeks, Rhododendron, Ft Constitution and Wentworth Coolidge Mansion. Deferred maintenance includes roofing, septic systems, dam repairs, and fire safety upgrades. The report includes a list of park improvement projects funded with the Parks Fund. Several parks buildings are at their 50+ year mark and are now considered historically and culturally significant as “mid-century modern,” making it challenging to unify the state park brand for building design that is in the spirit of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) buildings. The Sunapee project includes boat ramp improvements and expanding the parking lot for boat trailers. Wetlands and dredging permits are needed, as well as clearing a portion of land. The logistics for managing boat traffic and the naturally occurring siltation of the brook is a concern.

Act as an Advocate for State Park System: Legislation. Dir Bryce and Ms Tango-Lowy reviewed the list of 2020 legislation. HB 1273 free admission to military dependents and HB 1394 free access to parks after camper checkout would impact the Park Fund, park operations and park investments. These bills conflict with the statutory directive to operate like a business similar to the private sector. Parks has kept fees low so that state parks are accessible to all and offers programs like the Library Pass to help families. For HB 1319, Parks will provide input to any proposal to site a landfill abutting Forest Lake to protect the visitor experience (visual, auditory and odors), but defers to DES to appropriately regulate and issue permits that protects the environment. Members discussed how they might assist Parks. Dir Bryce is open to receiving comments and advice; and is always available to provide information to a legislator as a bill is being drafted. He is most concerned about the accumulated impacts to the park system.

Agreements. Dir Bryce reviewed the list of up-coming agreements. The AG’s Office advised Parks that the State should retain ownership and control of its buildings and improvements, but can grant long term agreements to third parties to enable them to obtain grant funding for park facility improvements, such as with Nansen Ski Club and Mount Prospect Ski Club. A SPAC leasing subcommittee meeting is needed to review the agreements and advise Parks. Mr Bruss, Mr Blanchette, Mr Leahy and Mr Gilbert will serve on the subcommittee.

Friends Groups. Ms Creedy Powers started in July 2019 as Volunteer Program Manager. She’s attended the meetings of volunteer groups, renewing volunteer agreements and assisting groups with updating their Annual Work Plans. Mr Blanchette commended her for the assistance she has given the volunteer groups.

Public Comment: Chair Gilbert opened the floor to public comment. There being none, the Council discussed Any Other Business.

Any Other Business. Commissioner Stewart said the divisions within the department, State Library, Arts, Historical Resources, Parks, and Forests & Lands are well integrated and working collaboratively. A recent example is the DHR archeology program conducted at Livermore Falls historic site last summer.

Rep Smith reminded members of the Jan 21st legislative hearings on parks-related bills and the Jan 29th hearings on OHRV-related bills. In response to a question from Rep Ebel, a copy of RR&D researcher Joel Anderson’s report on “Self-funding of the State Park System” will be sent to members and posted on the SPAC webpage.

Mr Nyhan credited Director Bryce and staff on their focus on community outreach, such as at the cookout and stage event for 250 seniors, and the two welcome receptions for 300 J-1 students

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.
Submitted by T. Tango-Lowy